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C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 000132

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SUBJECT: NORWAY DETERMINED - NO CHANGE OF COURSE IN AFGHANISTAN

REF: STATE 20453

Classified By: P/E Counselor Mike Hammer, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. Opposition parties in Parliament rallied behind Prime Minister Stoltenberg on February 8 when he announced "we will not give way to pressure," reinforcing the message that Norway remains committed in Afghanistan, despite calls from some left-wing Parliamentarians for Norway to withdraw. Foreign Minister Stoere assured Parliament that Norway intends to stay the course in its international engagement. However, as the events pile up -- including the February 7 attack on the Norwegian Embassy in Tehran, and the February 8 attack on an international observer station in Hebron that included 21 Norwegians -- many are beginning to question if Norway's international image will ever be the same and if they'll be able to maintain their treasured role as peace-maker extraordinaire. End Summary.

2. (U) In a highly unusual move, the normal Prime Minister's question time in Parliament was canceled on February 8 in order to allow PM Jens Stoltenberg to speak about the situation at the Norwegian Embassies in Damascus, Tehran and elsewhere and the attack on the Norwegian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Meymana, Afghanistan. Stoltenberg's main messages were clear:

- violence against those who are innocent is unacceptable, and reaction to the cartoons provides no justification for violence;
- Norway has a long-term view of international support for Afghanistan and will continue its military contributions in Afghanistan;
- Syria failed in its responsibilities to protect the Norwegian mission and a formal protest was delivered to Syria on February 8;
- on media freedom, it is up to the media, not governments, to decide what is acceptable to publish;
- the police security service has not changed its view that the security threat in Norway remains moderate, and there are no concrete threats against Norway or foreign interests in Norway, but that police awareness has been increased;
- Norwegian Muslims leaders deserve credit for distancing themselves from the acts of violence;
- the violent actions of a few do not reflect the meaning of all Muslims, but a small minority;
- this is not a war of religions, but a war of totalitarianism versus democracy; and
- those who face the greatest challenges are the majorities in Muslim countries who stand against such violence )

freedom of speech is not just the privilege of the West, and the majority of Muslims who reject violence deserve our support.

3. (U) The Prime Minister's comments were welcomed in turn by all party groups in Parliament, both those in government and opposition. When faced with a crisis, Norwegians return to consensus as their default mode. The only critical voices came from a handful of Socialist Left (SV) backbenchers who argued that Norway should pull completely out of Afghanistan. The Government quickly countered these left-wingers. "It is precisely when difficult situations arise that it is important for us to stand firm on the task we have undertaken," Stoltenberg said.

4. (U) Foreign Minister Stoere followed Stoltenberg with a previously scheduled New Year's update on Norway's foreign policy. In a one hour tour d'horizon, Stoere described the importance of the "High North" specifically citing the energy potential of the Barents and the importance of developing resources both on the Norwegian and Russian side of the border, close cooperation with the EU without plans to seek membership, contribution to a successful DOHA round, a peaceful solution in Darfur and continuing work with the Sudan peace agreement, support for UN reform, strengthening human rights around the globe, Norway's desire for a Middle East peace agreement following the Road Map, concerns about Iran and the broad international support for the IAEA reporting of Iran to the UN security Council. Stoere's comments can be found at <http://odin.dep.no/ud/engelsk>.

5. (U) The main message that Stoere wanted to convey was that events related to the Mohammed cartoons would not deter Norway from pursuing its active foreign policy line.

According to Stoere, Norway has three main foreign policy tracks; strengthening international law, maintaining close alliances, and promoting peace, reconciliation and development. Stoere specifically emphasized that Norwegian foreign policy is rooted in NATO, close ties to the Nordic countries and EU and "close friendship and cooperation with

the USA."

16. (C) Comment. Norway appreciates our offers of support (per reftel). The Norwegians are clearly hoping that the worst of the Mohammed cartoon-related attacks against Norwegian facilities abroad is over. We were told unofficially that the Foreign Ministry disbanded on February 8 its crisis response team set up in the wake of the Damascus attack. (Note. It can be quickly reconstituted if needed and there was considerable tension as demonstrators damaged their Embassy in Tehran. The FM told us he twice called his Iranian counterpart regarding protection of their mission. End note.) The united political support behind the government has strengthened its hand in asserting that Norway will stay the course in Afghanistan. The left-wing voices that piped up against Norway's continuing military contribution in Afghanistan were quickly put down. In fact, the MFA told us that the need to call in air support in Meymana strengthened the Government's case for why it was important to deploy F-16s.

17. (C) Comment continued. Despite FM Stoere's assurances about the continuity of Norway's international efforts, the question many Norwegians are asking is whether the world's image of Norway has changed. As one Foreign Ministry official told us on February 8, "the repercussions of Norway's association with the Mohammed cartoons will last for a long time." Another senior official expressed concern that Norway's ability to act as a mediator and peace-maker will clearly suffer.  
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